

**TAISHO STUDIES  
PART II**

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**JAPAN'S RESPONSE TO BRITAIN'S WARTIME NAVAL APPEALS,  
1917-19**

Discussion Paper  
No. IS/18/602  
December 2018

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## PREFACE

This pamphlet continues our series of publications devoted to conditions in Japan in the period of the Taisho Emperor who reigned from 1912 to 1926. Taisho Studies have tended to be neglected because it was a comparatively short reign and because the Emperor had to pass his duties to a regent because of his illness at the end of this period. But it was a time when Japanese strained every muscle in order to build on the prestige she had acquired through defeating Russia in the war of 1904-5. During the Great War she had considerable success both industrially and financially and secured her position internationally through her presence at the Paris Peace Conference. But her success generated suspicion on the part of other countries, even her long-term ally, Britain.

In 1914 Britain found herself in a global war and had to cope with the security problems of a far-flung empire. She was in difficulties over meeting the cost of sustaining naval forces in the Pacific and Indian Oceans at their accustomed levels and felt she had no alternative but to withdraw these forces to Europe in order to deal with the growing German naval power.

Britain made many appeals to Japan for help. But until December 1916 these were politely refused. This paper deals with the Tokyo cabinet's decision to send a destroyer squadron to the Mediterranean in order to defend allied convoys carrying food and troops to European battle fronts from German U boat attack. Though small in scope compared to Japan's role in the Pacific, it made a timely contribution to Britain's current dilemma. This event has tended to go unnoticed because Japan's contribution to World War I has tended to be devalued in international literature written since 1945.

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## JAPAN'S RESPONSE TO BRITAIN'S WARTIME NAVAL APPEALS, 1917-19

After the blood-letting of the last period of the Emperor Meiji's reign, most Japanese hoped that the Emperor Taisho (r. 1912-26) would preside over an era of peace in east Asia. Instead the European war broke out with its offshoot in the Pacific area. Japan considered that this affected her directly and was quick to declare war against Germany on 23 August 1914 – what she called her 'Nichi-Doku senso'. She found it to be in her national interest to attack the German fortress of Kiaochow (Qingdao) in China and sign up to the Declaration of London, thereby joining the Entente side. The object of this paper is to assess the contribution of Japan to the Allied cause in the European war and, in particular, her response to Britain's requests for assistance in coping with the German Submarine menace of 1917. (1)

Britain was ill-prepared for the outbreak of a global war in 1914 and looked around for sources of support. Despite her slight numerical superiority over the German East Asian squadron, she sought urgent assistance. Japan had acquired a great reputation for her decisive defeat of Russia on land and on sea in 1905. It might, therefore, be thought that it would be easy for the British to get some offers of help from Japan because of the Anglo-Japanese alliance which had been signed in 1902 and updated twice in 1905 and 1911. But in fact the alliance was in decline: the 1911 revision did not give the Japanese what they wanted, that is, a guarantee of support against attack by the United States and commercial cooperation in China. And Britain for her part disliked Japan's attitude towards China though she still relied on the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) for naval support. In any case the alliance was limited to the 'extreme east' and the requirements of the forthcoming war in 1914 were likely to be global.

When war broke out, Britain with her Entente partners approached Japan to send forces to Europe. But they got a firm negative reply on 2 September. Of course, the Japanese army was no friend of Britain; and Britain was informed by a well-wisher that it was a waste of time asking Japan to send troops to the western front. But the Allies continued to make regular appeals.

On the other hand, Britain and her partners were hopeful that the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) would cooperate globally with the Allied navies in general and would, in particular, share in operations against the Austrian navy in the Mediterranean. There was a traditional friendship between the British and Japanese navies. Britain's Ambassador in Tokyo, Sir William Conyngham Greene(1913-19), wrote that there were very few Japanese officers of any length of service 'who did not know England or at any rate a British port or two'. Britain had respect for Japan's naval skills; and there was much friendship between naval leaders. Disappointingly for Britain, there was also evidence of corruption, especially in the purchasing departments. This had come to the fore in 1913 with the Siemens scandal over naval tenders. Prime Minister Yamamoto, Minister of Marine Saito and Chief of Staff Takarabe took responsibility and resigned along with the ministry over the incident. Greene regretted the severance of relations with these senior Anglophil officers:

'their downfall appears to have been largely brought about through the mischievous activity of a British journalist [Andrew Pooley of Reuters] who has thereby not only helped to drag the navy of our ally through the mire, but to injure the reputation of British firms doing business with the Imperial Government.'

So internationally Anglo-Japanese naval relations were besmirched and, domestically, the reputation of the Japanese navy suffered in succeeding years. (2)

The war crept up unexpectedly and found Britain unprepared for the defence of her imperial interests, especially in seas remote from Europe. In east Asia Germany had leased Kiaochow Bay in China and proceeded to modernize its port, Qingtao, in order to provide a base for Tirpitz's Pacific squadron. This consisted mainly of the cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* with commerce raider *Emden* under the overall command of Admiral von Spee. The Royal Navy was unable to spare ships to deal with the unpredictable operations they might undertake in the Pacific and Indian oceans. Britain, therefore, made countless requests for naval assistance in hunting down the Germans and Japan did respond and played a large part in patrolling Pacific waters in the early months of the war. (3)

On 4 November the First Lord of the Admiralty appealed to Japan for 'the same powerful aid which they [Japanese] are supplying in the early period of the war' to be made available in a possible future Baltic Sea operation. Two weeks later Japan was again asked to consider sending a squadron to the Dardanelles to blockade the Austro-Turkish fleet. In response to both, Japan defined her naval policy: it was not contemplated to send an expeditionary force to distant foreign waters; for the cabinet to accept the British proposals would be to ignore its defence responsibilities nearer home. The requests were therefore declined. (4)

Japan was determined to control the Pacific Ocean in her own national interest. She increased the size of her southern squadrons under Admirals Matsumura Tatsuo and Yamaya Tanin. (5) Britain asked for protection for troop transports carrying Australian/New Zealand units heading for Europe; and Japan played a large role in assisting with the escorting of these vessels and continued to do so for the duration of the war. The force initially commanded by Captain Kato Kanji (Hiroharu) on the battle-cruiser *Ibuki* earned much praise. Japan cooperated in chasing German commerce raiders around the Pacific. *Emden*, a major source of trouble in the Indian ocean, was pursued until she was finally sunk by the Australian light cruiser Sydney on 4 November. (6)

Quite independently of Britain's requests Japan showed an early interest in Germany's stake in the Marshall, Mariana and Caroline islands which were groups of Pacific islets north of the equator. Her navy lost no time in occupying the islands. This was disappointing for Britain's dominions in the southern hemisphere whose own operations there had to be called off. London decided not to dispute the issue because of the wide range of assistance which it had been receiving from Japan. Australia had herself occupied German New Guinea south of the equator and Samoa. Eventually the situation was clarified on 1 December when Japan passed over a formal note:

'All the German islands in the Caroline, Marshall, Marianne and Pellew groups are under occupation by the Imperial Japanese Navy [IJN]... Having regard to the very wide operations in which IJN is and has been engaged in cooperation with the British navy, the nation [Japan] would naturally insist on retaining permanently all the German islands lying north of the equator.' (7)

Sir Edward Grey, Britain's foreign secretary, had to reply that Britain could not guarantee in advance what a peace conference would decide on this point and advised that acquisitions of German territory should not extend beyond certain bounds and would have to be 'without prejudice to the final arrangements when the Allies come to settle the terms of peace'. (8)

When Indian troops in Singapore mutinied on 15 February 1915, causing the deaths of 17 British and Japanese, the local Japanese commander of the third squadron, Admiral Tsuchiya Mitsukane, who was sailing to the north in the light-cruiser *Tsushima*, received a call for help and returned to Singapore. He landed 247 marines. Britain's wartime allies, France and Russia, joined the fray; and the outbreak was eventually suppressed within a fortnight.

Early in 1916 further appeals were made by the Admiralty for help in the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Britain's Mediterranean Fleet had tried to intercept the Austrian cruisers *Goeben* and *Breslau* sailing from the Adriatic to join the Turks when they entered the war but failed to stop them. The ships became active within the Ottoman navy and were a menace to shipping. In February Grey asked Japan to send ships to the Mediterranean 'on a scale proportionate to [her] naval power'. Britain promised that every facility in her arsenals and dockyards and financial aid would be made available. Japanese responded helpfully but imprecisely. Later in the month Britain asked Japan for help in dealing with commerce-raiders operating in the Indian Ocean, specifying her needs as a small force of destroyers in the Malacca Straits and a cruiser squadron to operate between Australia and Aden. This was agreed subject to Britain negotiating relaxations in the regulations for Japanese doctors practicing in the Straits Settlements. (9)

## THE GERMAN JAPANESE WAR [NICHU DOKU SENSO]

After declaring war on Germany, Japan wasted no time in attacking the German leased-territory of Kiaochow. A force of 30,000 (with 2000 British-Indian soldiers) was launched on 2 September and outnumbered the German garrison which surrendered on 7 November. It was a spectacular achievement, doubly so by capturing Qingtao, the base of the German Pacific squadron. The Tokyo cabinet breathed a sigh of relief

and was confronted by congratulations on her success from the European wartime coalition. The Admiralty especially praised her for the effectiveness of the expeditionary force and went on to ask if, after the Qingdao operation was finished, Japan might be persuaded to use the same expertise she had shown by cooperating with the RN when it came to launch its campaign in the Baltic in 1915. Japan said 'No'. The ministry could not afford to ignore the popular view expressed by a well-known Japanese journalist:

'Now that Kiaochow has fallen and the German cruisers have been sunk, there is nothing to disturb the peace of the east. The task for which Japan fought Germany has now been achieved. Why has Japan to suffer the agony of sending troops to Europe?' (10)

Following their invasion of Shandong province, the Japanese presented a slate of demands to China's leaders in January 1915 which were given the name of 'the 21 Demands'. They were tantamount to a Japanese encroachment in Chinese affairs in the realms of the police and the military. After harsh negotiations, a Sino-Japanese treaty was signed in May. This approach was welcomed in nationalist quarters in Japan but broadly criticized by academics. Foreign countries looked on aghast at the 'enormity' of these demands insofar as they were able to extract the terms out of a secretive Japan. Not a single country came out in defence of Japan's approach. But, while the Allies were suspicious and critical, they could not in the uncertain circumstances of war afford to get involved. Foreign belligerents had to maintain a formal cordiality towards Japan. (11)

Japan felt that, in these dealings with China, Britain had not given her the support she expected under their alliance. In order to avoid isolation, she looked for a new ally in Russia. Since the beginning of the war Russia had placed large orders in Japan for rifles, ammunition, food and other goods for the eastern front. In January 1916 Grand Duke George Mikhailovich was sent on a mission to persuade Tokyo to sell even more ammunition and supplies. Japan was agreeable but made it a condition that she should receive compensation by way of the transfer to Japan of a portion of the Chinese Eastern Railway south of Harbin in Manchuria. Whether this was a demand by Japan or the offer made by a desperate Russia is hard to tell. But it certainly made

the alliance negotiations difficult and especially lengthy. The two Powers came together in the secret Russo-Japanese alliance in July. It was a reciprocal treaty which laid down that Japan would not be a party to any arrangement or political combination directed against Russia and therefore the wartime Entente. The 'compensation package' did not come to pass because the Bolshevik leadership, when they came to power, scrapped the secret treaties of their tsarist predecessors. But the potential railway swap is relevant to this paper because it indicates Japan's tactics at this juncture of seeking material compensation for commitments made. (12)

1916 was a year of political transition for both Japan and Britain. General Terauchi Masakata formed a cabinet in October. He appointed Dr Baron Motono Ichiro who had been ambassador in St Petersburg as foreign minister. Having served in an embassy in Europe during the early years of the war, Motono understood conditions on the western and eastern fronts better than most Japanese and had been responsible for negotiating the alliance just concluded. Although attached to one of the military cliques, Terauchi proved more amenable to international approaches than his predecessors.

## BRITAIN AND THE GERMAN SUBMARINE MENACE

In Britain too a fresh government under David Lloyd George was formed in December at a moment of supreme crisis. The incoming ministry was told that it could no longer rely on the Royal Navy to protect the supply routes for food on its own. There had been a dramatic increase in the sinking of merchant shipping because of Germany's use of submarines, a weapon in which she was much superior to Britain. Germany, herself the victim of Britain's naval blockade, intensified these activities and from February 1917 embarked on an unrestricted submarine campaign, claiming that the Entente Powers had rejected her peace overtures. (13)

London responded by planning a convoy system for protection of merchant vessels but discovered that the Admiralty did not have enough destroyers for the task. It realized that help was needed from outside the company of European belligerents and approached the US and Japan. Pressure was stepped up on Japan for assistance in dealing with these convoys, some of which came from the Antipodes and India. Such

a proposal was not new; but it was now made with a sense of urgency. Britain was bold enough to propose that two of the four Japanese light-cruisers assisting her at Singapore should be transferred to the Mediterranean in order to escort merchant shipping under submarine attack. Japan was prepared to consider the proposal provided she had advance assurances of support at a future peace conference. Writing to his colleagues, the new foreign minister, Motono, suggested Japan would be well-advised to give the Entente countries as much help as possible if she was to be sure of some future reward. (14) In any case Japan herself suffered from these U-boat attacks. The Yamashita Kisen *Yasukuni Maru* carrying a consignment of petroleum had been attacked and sunk on 3 November 1915.

After much high-level discussion, the long-serving naval minister, Admiral Kato Tomosaburo, recommended a policy of cooperation with the Allies. On 12 January, the Tokyo cabinet adopted a new naval policy. Whereas previous administrations had limited the area of Japan's operations and declined to send ships to the Mediterranean, the Terauchi team were prepared to be induced to change course. Motono, accordingly, replied to Britain that it would be easier for Japan to make up her mind if she received certain assurances of compensation. Britain agreed to the conditions. The official British war cabinet decision was passed over on 13 February, giving the assurance that Britain 'will support Japan's claims in regard to disposal of Germany's rights in Shantung and Germany's possessions in Islands north of Equator on occasion of Peace Conference' on the understanding that Japan would support her claim to islands south of the equator. Similar secret undertakings of support were given by France and Russia. In February the Japanese cabinet agreed to make available the light cruiser *Akashi* and 2 flotillas of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Squadron to be based at Valletta in Malta. The Japanese lost no time; and the cruiser with 8 new destroyers commanded by Rear-Admiral Sato Kozo reached Malta on 13 April. (15)

On 5 May King George V invited the new ambassador to London, Chinda Sutemi, as guest at Windsor Castle and emphasized to him that Germany still seemed to be aiming to drive the British people to starvation. He requested further naval assistance. Ten days later the Tokyo cabinet agreed to send four more destroyers under the *Izumo*, which replaced the *Akashi* in August. The unusual involvement of the king in

this appeal suggests that Britain estimated that the threat was growing and this form of escort assistance was urgently needed.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Squadron (*Tokumu Kantai*) embarked on its duties of escorting transports crossing the Mediterranean. They had to safeguard the routes from Alexandria to Marseilles, Taranto and Salonika. Early on the new destroyer *Sakaki* was attacked in the Kythira Channel not far from Crete by the U Boat U-27 of the Austro-Hungarian navy on 11 June. The torpedo caused serious damage and about 60 deaths including that of her commander, Captain Uehara Taishi, and many casualties who had to be taken to a hospital ship. The ship was towed by HMS *Ribble* to Suda Bay and later for major repairs to Piraeus. It was an early warning that these Mediterranean undertakings might prove to be a perilous assignment. On the other hand, Japan was gratified that her role in the Mediterranean convoys was widely praised for its general efficiency and its contribution to the war effort.

#### FACTORS IN JAPAN'S DECISION

This change of policy was the decision of the cabinet led by General Terauchi with its strong military influences. But obviously it was the navy which had to have the major say in a decision of this specialized kind. Much depended on Admiral Kato Tomosaburo, the navy minister (1912-21) who had gained popularity for steering through substantial programmes of naval building. Tokyo's thinking was that the United States (Japan's theoretical enemy) was well advanced in the process of building an enlarged fleet and Japan should be prepared for the contingency of naval conflicts in the Pacific as had been much discussed in 1913-14 and should not reduce her home fleet. With US being on the verge of joining the war entente, Japan felt she needed friends. (16)

There were those in naval circles who thought it was hazardous to send the vessels just built into a dangerous warzone. On the other hand, the European war was generating a new maritime technology which the seadogs were anxious to experience at first hand. A naval mission had been sent to the European battlefronts led by Admiral Akiyama Saneyuki, hero of the battle of Tsushima 1905 and a highly regarded naval thinker who had always favoured entering the war. It returned in mid-October after a

visit to Russia, Finland, Britain, France and Italy. Following high level talks with naval leaders abroad, Akiyama formed the firm view that Germany was going to lose the war and Japan should look favourably on the Entente's requests. (17) This seems to have been a turning-point in Japan's attitude. There was internal opposition to the Mediterranean proposal but it failed.

Finance appears to have played only a modest part in the decision. Before the war began in 1914 Japan was crippled financially, not having fully recovered from her struggle with Russia, and suffered from a large foreign debt. As the war progressed, Japan's fortunes improved. Manufacturing industry found markets; the national income increased; and Japan was able to give overseas loans. So Japan was more inclined to respond to Entente appeals in the later part of the war. The cabinet realized that the problem of sending ships to the Mediterranean would change the structure of naval budgeting. It would expand the theatre for IJN's normal operations from coastal to international waters. On the other hand, the country was not required until 1918 to mobilize large numbers of troops and so did not have to face a costly army budget as well as a naval one.

How far did international circumstances play their part in Japan's decision? Japanese leaders looked first to revolutionary Russia, but more to the US which had in 1916 elected President Woodrow Wilson for a second term on a platform of continuing neutrality. On 12 December he offered mediation which seemed to be following an earlier initiative by Germany. This was endorsed by Austria and supported by the Pope, Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries. Japan was asked for her opinion on the peace-terms and, after consulting her wartime allies, replied categorically that she was not in a position to enter discussions for a separate peace with Germany. In any case Wilson's peace overture lapsed because Germany resumed her submarine campaign. (19) Wilson asked the belligerents to declare their war aims. This troubled Japanese politicians who saw Washington's tactics as a means of depriving them of the gains that had been made since the outbreak of war.

## US ENTERS THE FRAY

The US broke off relations with Germany in February 1917 and declared war early in April. The president whose thinking was certain to influence the peace-makers when the time came, was not shy of clarifying his general standpoint which favoured a peace which was based on No annexations and avoided 'spoils'. Anticipating this, Japanese politicians envisaged losing the gains which they had acquired since 1914 which they felt they had earned by their war record and hoped they had secured by the carefully planned guarantees of support they had received. (20)

How were the Allies to integrate America's great war-potential into their war efforts? In April A.J. Balfour, Britain's elderly foreign secretary, was called on at short notice to visit Washington. He had to disclose to Wilson's team the nature of the various secret guarantees which Britain had given to countries in order to persuade them to assist the Entente. In particular Britain had given the Japanese 'guarantees' over China and Equatorial islands in the Pacific Ocean. Balfour used his visit to assuage some of the anti-Japanese feeling rampant in the US which looked askance at Japan's naval expansion. 'I did what I could', he wrote, 'to combat the suspicions [about Japan] which seemed to me somewhat excessive'. Moreover, Balfour tried to persuade Washington about Japan's potential as a future ally. Japan was herself taking steps to repair their bad relationship by sending the Ishii mission to Washington in the autumn. (21)

Britain's continuing sense of naval weakness made her very dependent on both the Americans and the Japanese. At this time her main concern was over the main fleet, not just the Mediterranean convoys. On 21 July 1917 Admiral Jellicoe wrote to the First Lord of the Admiralty:

By end of 1917 the situation in regard to the comparative strength of the British and German Battle-Cruiser Forces will be serious..... There seems to be only one way of meeting this difficulty, namely by the use of Japanese battle-cruisers, as this is the only other nation besides Germany and ourselves possessing vessels of this type. (22)

Jellicoe proposed that the ambassador in Tokyo should be asked to sound the Japanese Government as to its willingness to sell to Britain two of their battle-cruisers. This line was approved by the War Cabinet and presented to Japan who replied in October, regretting that her navy which had only four battle-cruisers was unable to meet British wishes. Ministers in London later modified their request, suggesting Japan should attach two of her battle-cruisers with Japanese crews to the Grand Fleet for the duration of the war. But again Tokyo replied on 15 November with a refusal. (23) Agonizingly Britain had had difficulties in securing support from two friendly countries, the United States and Japan, who were suspicious of one another.

The war situation continued tense in Europe and east Asia. The old scare that the Japanese army had long promoted whereby the Germans might advance along the Trans-Siberian railway and cobble together some arrangement with China over the Chinese Eastern Railway, excluding the Japanese, again surfaced. Prompted by a secret Anglo-French understanding, the Japanese general staff lobbied for an intervention in Siberia – a sort of ‘Eastern Front’ - and pursued it in spite of the resistance of hesitant members of the cabinet and the navy. (24) France and Britain were moving in the direction of supporting a Japanese initiative in the east. Tokyo had been so reluctant in the past to agree to any of the allied proposals that it was a surprise that a senior member of the British War Cabinet, Lord Milner, wrote in support of the idea arguing that

When we came to examine in detail how and where [Japan] could help, we have always got ourselves bogged down in ‘doubts and dismays’. (25)

Thus Britain needed to consider fresh initiatives and look for new partners in Japan.

## ROYAL EXCHANGES

At the frosty end of 1917, spirits throughout Europe were low. The uncertainties over the Bolshevik revolution, the prospect of the arrival of US troops in large numbers and the promise of a German spring offensive forced most governments to make a serious adjustment of their thinking. Britain’s hopes for Japanese assistance came up for review. Could it be that the Japanese military were offended by the lack of attention

shown to them in the past? Could they be won over now by an appeal to a new surge of Japanese patriotism? Their traditional loyalty to the German military had been denied to be sure. How would an approach now be received?

On New Year's eve 1918, King George V sent a telegram of goodwill to the Taisho Emperor, emphasizing that their two countries were closely united in a common endeavour. It was a telegram of British confidence in future Japanese cooperation. It invited the Emperor to accept the rank of Field-Marshal in the British army. The offer was readily accepted. The idea had originated with Major Francis Piggott who after some periods as military attache in Japan was serving in France. He managed to convince his superiors and later military and cabinet members in London of the possibilities of getting fuller Japanese cooperation from Japan. Hence the royal telegram. (26)

By way of reciprocity the British sovereign was asked to receive the rank of a Japanese Field-marshal. That too was agreed. In order to take this exchange of gestures further, the British cabinet decided on 18 March to present the Taisho Emperor with a Field-marshal's baton of the British army, knowing that this would entail sending a Special Mission to Japan to confer the honour. There was a strong lobby in cabinet circles associated with the press barons, Lords Northcliffe and Beaverbrook, who were dissatisfied that the country's efforts at propaganda in Japan had so far been poor and wanted to use the mission to bring about changes. But they did not get their way. It was decided in April that the mission would be royal and would not indulge in propaganda nor have any overt political purpose. There was no doubt, however, that in such a delicate international situation an official mission would inevitably have some political overtones. (27)

The Special Mission was led by Prince Arthur of Connaught who had visited Japan on similar missions in 1906 and 1912. It reached Japan in June, consisting of General Sir William Pulteney and other senior officers who had had experience of trench warfare on the western front. It was designed to impress the upper echelons of the Japanese army who had no corresponding experience and were more concerned with careers in China than in Europe. But whether it did make an impression is difficult to establish. (28) Although otherwise exuberant about the mission's success, Ambassador Greene

pointed out it had been expected that the Emperor 'would have worn the uniform of a Field Marshal in the British Army which it was understood that His Majesty had ordered from England, but this feature of the ceremony did not materialise'. It is likely that this is a pointer to some behind-the-scenes discord in higher army circles in Japan. (29)

While no senior naval member had been appointed to the delegation, Prince Arthur made clear in his many speeches that there was a naval dimension to his mission and that he had been instructed to pass on King George V's appreciation of the services rendered to the Allied cause by the Imperial Japanese Navy. So the thanks which he had to convey was largely directed to the navy:

I have taken every opportunity of expressing appreciation of what the Imperial Navy is doing in the Mediterranean, and not only in the Mediterranean but in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, which have been kept open to the world's trade by Japanese vigilance. (30)

It may be because of this naval emphasis that Japan's reciprocal visit to thank the British was led by Admiral Prince Higashi Fushimi who visited Britain in late summer and presented King George with a sword. The exchange of Field-marshal's batons was naturally less appropriate in a naval and Japanese context. Later in the year Prince Arthur was invited by the Japanese Navy to join the new battle-cruiser Kirishima on a voyage to Canada – surely a testimony to the success of his mission in some Japanese eyes!

The Connaught Mission's stay in the Japanese capital coincided with a particularly fraught period for the Japanese cabinet. On the home front, it was, wrote the British ambassador, 'the fag end of the political season'. The Japanese people were up in arms over rice pricing and shortages; and widespread rioting was taking place in the major cities. There was also an international crisis in the east as the result of the Russian revolutions. There had been naval action when Japan sent two cruisers to Vladivostok in order to prevent the colossal quantities of allied stores there falling into the hands of the Bolsheviks. (31) When Lenin accepted Germany's swingeing peace terms under the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March, it caused infinite speculation in Japan: Would it lead to German-Bolshevik cooperation in the far east? Japan was worried

about her interests in Korea and Manchuria but took no action for the time being because of the ambiguous attitude being shown by Washington over Japan sending a large force to Siberia.

On 7 June the Allied Supreme War Council, in effect Britain, France and Italy, made a formal approach to Japan in the hope of inducing her to take part in a combined expedition to Vladivostok 'in the wider interests of the war effort'. This phrase is interesting: 'Siberia' was seen by some as being part of an extension of the European war-scene. Though Japan had indicated her willingness in January, she again took no immediate action because her politicians were divided. But Balfour, the British foreign secretary, went out of his way to welcome the apparent readiness of the Japanese army to make a new effort in the common cause in Siberia where it was necessary 'to stop German encroachment in the east and so contribute to the aims of the Great War'. In this he was more enthusiastic than the Wilson administration which only decided in August to give grudging support to Japan having a prominent role in any intervention. (32)

## THE END OF THE EUROPEAN WAR

The nature of the European war had meanwhile been changing with the prospect of American troops arriving. The U-boat menace had been substantially relieved by the use of convoys; and submarine warfare had entered a less acute phase, though food supplies were still short. But escort duty was still regarded as a dangerous enterprise as shown when the French steamer SS Athos was sunk by submarines with 750 casualties.

There was some allied fleet action against the Goeben and the Breslau, the Austrian light cruisers which had become part of the Ottoman fleet. Goeben was mined in January though she survived the war in a bad state, while the Breslau (Midieli) was sunk with heavy casualties. Admiral Lord Fisher, retired from senior posts but always ready to express his views, indicates some of the inter-Allied tensions which affected operations in the Mediterranean:

'Observe the Mediterranean! The whole sea power of France and Italy is collected in the Mediterranean to fight the puny Austrian fleet! They haven't fought it! Not only that, but the Goeben and Breslau, known to be fast and efficient, emerge from the Dardanelles (Jan 20th 1918), massacre two of our monitors, never meant to be out there and totally unfitted for the service; and two obsolete British destroyers have to put up a fight, but God intervened and sent the Goeben and Breslau on top of mines. It was the act of God, not the act of Wemyss, that drove those Germans away from the coast of Syria, where they would have played hell with Allenby! We have pandered to the French and Italians from the beginning of the War'... (33)

British commanders took comfort from the presence of the Japanese. When Germany launched her spring offensive in spring 1918, the importance of Japanese escorts dramatically increased because reinforcements had to be transported urgently across the Mediterranean. But some factors relieved some of the pressure on the Allied naval operations there: the collapse of Austria and Bulgaria during the summer and the peace approaches of the Sultan in October.

By the time the armistice was declared in November, the Japanese ships, 2 cruisers and 12 destroyers, had spent 14 months on Mediterranean duties. This force had been supplemented when Britain transferred 2 destroyers [Minstrel and Nemesis, renamed Sendan and Kanran] and 2 trawlers [Miningsby and Tokyo II] to be crewed by Japanese for the duration. These ships had protected 788 allied vessels, carrying an estimated 750,000 troops. Overall the casualties sustained were 78 of whom 73 were buried in Malta, many in the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery. The most dramatic event had been when the destroyer Sakaki had been badly damaged in June, the only loss during the whole operation. (34)

After the armistice some Japanese vessels had to supervise the surrender of German ships which took them to Kataro and Poola (Pula) in the Adriatic. Others took part in a cruise around European naval ports in order to give the crews some rest and recreation and increase the awareness of the work they had been doing, visiting Allied ports in France, Italy, Greece, and Britain. In photographs of the time Japanese crews are to be seen relaxing on the steps of the Acropolis in Athens and St Pauls

Cathedral in London. Their Farewell to Malta eventually took place on 15 May 1919 in the main square of Valletta where the Illustrated London News shows the Hinomaru flag and the Union Jack fluttering side by side. The ships arrived back at Yokosuka in early July. (35)

Professor Hiram, the author of major studies of this subject, writes that Britain forgot to say Thank You. Britain never denied Japan's great naval contribution in the Mediterranean but, like Oliver, was always expecting more from Japan generally. Britain recognized that during the war it was the IJN that controlled the Pacific and Indian Oceans and that, without Japanese collaboration, Britain would have lost her line of communications with her Antipodean dominions and India. There is evidence of cordial Anglo-Japanese collaboration and mutual respect in these eastern seas. Indeed Royal Navy commanders had no hesitation in praising Japanese ships and crews at the expense of their French and Italian partners.

The Japanese navy ministry had issued instructions that these Mediterranean crews should take advantage of this collaboration to learn techniques of modern warfare from the Royal Navy. They updated their knowledge about submarines, torpedoes and mines and how to deal with all three. But there was evidently also an element of resentment. Hiram reports that 'In the Mediterranean while escorting British troops, Japanese destroyers were not leased the submarine detection device, and Japanese liaison officers were not allowed to deal with crypt analysis'. And after the war, Hiram argues, Britain's attitude of collaboration suddenly changed and she refused to grant Japan even the slightest concessions. (36)

So far as Britain was concerned, her gratitude may have fallen short of Japan's expectations. But it was nonetheless not inconsiderable. The cabinet had sent the Connaught mission which was a conspicuous gesture of thanksgiving. Much of the apparent 'ingratitude' could be attributed to domestic and foreign preoccupations of the immediate post-war period. But King George V at Buckingham Palace did welcome Admiral Sato, the commander of the Japanese force, and 7 of his officers who received special commendations. Later Britain passed over 7 German U boats as reparations (senrihin [chattels of war]) in tiptop condition. They were formally passed over at Portland and set off for refitting in Malta. Because Japanese specialists in submarines

were relatively few, a specialized unit, the tokumukan kanto (bu), took over the ships from Malta onwards and sailed them home, reaching Yokosuka in mid-June. These were formidable examples of inter-state friendship. (37)

Japan was appropriately represented at victory parades in London on 19 July 1919 but they took place after the Mediterranean fleet had been repatriated to Japan so the navy had to be represented by the army – an unfortunate arrangement because of the fragile relations which existed between the two services.

The Mediterranean force felt that it was treated as a Forgotten Army by politicians in Japan herself (like many units in past history fighting on the frontier far away from their home countries). It ranked lower among the politicians than the more immediate civil disturbances caused by the rice riots and the diplomatic crisis over the Siberian Intervention.

#### NAVAL DEMANDS AT PARIS

As the mariners left Mediterranean climes, the Japanese diplomats were fighting their corner at the gathering of Allied peace-makers assembled in Paris. As a first priority they sought to retain the territories in China they had acquired from Germany. But an important constituency, the navy, was determined to hold on to the German islands in Micronesia. On 27 January 1919 Japan asked the Council of Ten for the unconditional transfer of the Carolines, Marshalls and Mariana islands it had conquered north of the Equator. Her units had occupied them since September 1914 and had tried, she argued, to organize local government and schooling for the children. Some progress had been made during the years of her occupation but it fell far short of her aspirations. She was now calling for Japan to be given outright possession in order to carry forward the task. (38) In the Council of Ten the question of secret wartime treaties came up; and the chairman, President Wilson, argued that these had to be regarded as provisional and obtained general agreement to that principle. He further put forward the proposal that the Pacific islands should be given to countries by way of mandates to be administered by the League of Nations when it came into existence. Japan opposed the proposal for mandates. (39)

Over the Micronesian islands, the conference ultimately decreed that they should be allocated to countries under a Class C mandate which would come under the auspices of the newly formed League of Nations. But the League was still only vaguely organized. It was only on 28 April that its covenant was passed. On 7 May it was decided to award island groups north of Equator to Japan and those south of Equator to Australia while German Samoa would go to New Zealand. The navy was gradually reconciled to the fact that the award of a Class C mandate, while it had weaknesses compared to complete sovereignty for Japan, would give it security: no other power would be allowed to fortify mandated islands. The C class 'Mandate for German Possessions in the Pacific Ocean situated north of the Equator' was not issued by the League to Japan until 17 December 1920. (40) It was a reward for IJN's naval endeavours, including the Mediterranean exercise.

It is highly significant that this claim for the Pacific Islands formed Article I in the Tokyo government's instructions to its delegates and was high in its list of desiderata at Paris. (41) But the delegates there do not seem to have pressed the case for exclusive possession with the fervour they showed for Shantung and racial questions, generally regarded as their make or break issues. The secretary of the British delegation, Sir Maurice Hankey, depressed that Italy had walked away discontented over her failure to gain Fiume on 28 April, mentions in a letter to his wife that instructions from Tokyo to its delegates had leaked out that led him to

'expect a Japanese crisis this afternoon, and I shouldn't be a bit surprised if they [Japanese] left the conference too. President Wilson, with his wretched, hypocritical Fourteen Points, has already alienated the Italians, and is now about to alienate the Japs. I don't mind him alienating them from the League of Nations, but I do mind his driving a wedge between them and us.' (42)

The Japanese in Tokyo, however, decided not to make a fuss but tabled a declaration in favour of equal opportunities for trade and commerce in C class mandates. By consultation with Lord Milner of Britain, they obtained some clarification and modification of the term 'mandate'. The IJN emerged from the war as the world's 3rd largest sea power and found that the mandated islands were a useful acquisition at comparatively modest outlay. If Japan was dissatisfied with the mandate 'solution', the

US and Britain scarcely wanted Japan bedded in the central Pacific. But C class mandates were the least objectionable solution in the eyes of those in Paris.

Britain had in 1917 offered Japan conditional assistance over the destiny of German islands at a future peace conference but had coupled that with the warning that there might not be room for horse-trading. In the event that was so: many of the negotiators came to Paris expecting a settlement in terms of the spoils of war but the 1919 settlement as it worked out did not allow for special concessions. (43)

## ASSESSMENT

Japan's contribution to the European war was limited in the military sphere to her campaign against Qingdao. I do not include among the numbers of Japanese troops contributed to the Allies, as many Japanese do, the 70,000 men sent to the Siberian intervention in 1918. Successive governments in Tokyo turned down Allied requests for troops to be sent to the western front 'on a proportionate basis'. They had no hesitation in saying No, when approached by the belligerents. They knew the strength of their position. But the issue whether men should be sent to the European battle fronts weighed heavily on the Japanese conscience throughout the war years.

We have focused in this paper on Japan's naval contributions first in the Pacific and Indian Ocean which was her natural zone but where she had, she said, to expand her sphere of activities 'in cooperation with the Royal Navy'. After a change of government at the end of 1916, Japan became convinced that Germany could not win the war and offered to enter into a naval commitment in return for compensation: Japan would undertake naval duties in the Mediterranean in return for certain secret pledges of support from Britain. Japan's actions there from the spring of 1917 were highly commended by the Entente. Japan had moved from being 'a doubtful partner' to undertaking a more active role. Ultimately Japan sat at the top table but did not receive at the Paris deliberations of 1919 the outcome that she hoped for, as Grey and Balfour had earlier foreseen and explained. Her optimistic expectations of receiving compensation at the conference had not been fulfilled and she was left with a sense of grievance.

There have been varying assessments of Japan's assistance to the Allied cause. The Tokyo government had doubts about the popularity of these Mediterranean operations among the general public which was only informed sketchily about what their navy had been doing beyond the Pacific Ocean. It was only in early December 1918 that the Japanese Navy Ministry issued an official report on 'the wonderful task performed by our navy'. This secrecy may have been caused by the cabinet's awareness that the operation in the Mediterranean was small and not as dramatic as the Battle of the Japan Sea in 1905 which the Japanese public had relished and might have come to expect again in 1917-18.

A strong advocate of Japan's contribution was understandably the Naval Attache at the Court of St James's. In a lecture to the Japan Society of London on 30 April 1920, he saluted 'Our Navy's enormous contributions to the successful conclusion of this Great War' and claimed that it had 'participated in the safe-guarding of the seas from German violence almost over the whole world, excepting the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean'. Many authors have supported this viewpoint. (44)

Turning finally to Britain's reactions. Britain, finding herself in 1914 unprepared for the kind of global war which she had to fight to preserve her Empire, subconsciously relied on receiving favourable replies to her many pleas for help. To some extent that was based on the thinking in London, mistakenly I believe, that Japan had an obligation towards the European war based on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Not so. Foreign Minister Kato had said in 1914 that Japan's actions would not accord with the strict letter of the Alliance, but follow its spirit. Japan's responses were until 1917 disappointing. That having been said, the Tokyo government changed tack and ventured into European waters as a fully fledged member of the wartime coalition. Tokyo governments fulfilled what they had promised in 1917 and the Imperial Navy carried out its duties at a high professional level.

Let us reflect on the conclusions of Ambassador Greene who was one of the intermediaries most closely involved in this uncertain wartime partnership. In the course of his long stint as ambassador in Tokyo (1913-19), he was the conveyer of many anguished pleas from London. He could be harsh in his judgments, describing Japan towards the end of the war as doing 'little more than fill the role of an onlooker'

(44). By this he presumably meant that, by comparison with the other allies, Japan was less directly concerned and had come through the four years of war with a very low casualty rate because it had not been engaged in a major land campaign. Pondering the responses he received over the years, however, Greene was more positive. Summing up his wartime experience of asking for Japanese military/naval assistance, he wrote that successive ministers

‘While refusing to consent, have in the end either consented – for a consideration – [or offered to reconsider] if Britain should ever find herself brought to her knees.’ (45)

Japan had met Britain’s emergency call in 1917 and performed an auxiliary role which was very useful to the Royal Navy.

Bear in mind that France and Russia were also appealing to Japan for help on different grounds from Britain, sometimes from a moral standpoint. But Japanese had little sense of moral outrage at Germany and her allies. In the Russian case the appeals were requests for ammunition and Japan was ready to comply if her arsenals allowed it.

When the peace conference was being planned, Ambassador Matsui Keishiro, the ambassador in Paris, who had been appointed as one of the conference plenipotentiaries, confessed he was scared that his country’s contributions to the second half of the war would not entitle it to a place among the principal delegates. (46) There was indeed some latent opposition. Ultimately Japan was given a position close to the chief negotiators or their advisers where she could argue her case. She could claim to be a ‘Great Power’. By her attitudes she was able to recover some of the international reputation she had forfeited in China in 1915.

## ENDNOTES

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21. FO800/203, Balfour to Milner, 18 Jan. 1918. Blanche Dugdale, Arthur James Balfour, Hutchinson, 1936, vol. 2
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25. FO800/203, Milner to Balfour, 18 January 1918
26. FSG Piggott, *Broken Thread*, Gale & Polden, 1950, p. 96ff. Piggott was invited to join the delegation but declined.
27. Beaverbrook complained that British governments had only a juvenile conception of 'propaganda'.
28. FO800/203, Greene to Balfour, 3 July 1918. Captain the Master of Sinclair and Major Lord Pembroke attended as representatives of the British army.
29. *ibid*
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